



The “Why” of What We Do at Helping Services: A Story of Strength and Survival

Below is a testimonial from a survivor submitted by an Advocate at Helping Services. This survivor came to our program at Helping Services through a referral from another service provider after the survivor had left her abusive partner. She was struggling to make ends meet and needed help identifying resources and supports. Since making contact, our Advocate has been actively involved in helping her identify employment opportunities, assisted with immigration concerns, and provided financial and material assistance to her and her young children.

“She came from the Pacific Islands with the ocean still living in her bones. Instead, she found a man who mistook control for love.

At first, his words were gentle, his promises steady. He told her she was safe. He told her she was chosen. She believed him because she wanted to believe in something new. She built a small life around him, one child, then another—tiny hands, sleepy smiles, laughter that filled the quiet spaces. She became a mother before she learned how to protect herself.

The violence did not arrive all at once. It crept in slowly, disguised as anger, disguised as stress, disguised as her fault. She learned to shrink, to apologize, to stay quiet for the sake of peace. But peace never came.

One night, after an argument his rage finally showed its full weight. That night ended in a hospital room—bright lights, aching silence, fear wrapped around her heart tighter than any wound. Her children were safe, but she realized something had to change before safety became a memory instead of a promise.

Lying in that hospital bed, bruised and exhausted, she made that choice to leave and find a safe home for her and her children.

It was quiet at first, like the tide pulling back before it surges forward. She understood then that love was not supposed to hurt. That her children deserved to grow up watching their mother stand, and be independent.

Healing did not happen overnight. Some days she felt strong. Other days she doubted herself, her worth, her future. But she kept going. For her children. For the baby still growing inside her. For the woman she used to be—and the woman she was becoming.”

Transitional Housing Program Opens

At Helping Services Domestic Abuse Resource Center, we believe everyone deserves a safe place to call home. That’s why we are so excited to announce that we received a \$500,000 grant from the Office on Violence Against Women to support survivors in locating, applying for, and maintaining safe and stable housing through our Transitional Housing Program.

Through up to 12 months of rental assistance, along with housing-focused advocacy, budgeting support, and case management, this program is designed to help participants build long-term financial stability in a home that is safe from abuse.

Survivors of domestic violence who demonstrate an immediate need for housing assistance and do not have sufficient resources available may apply for our Transitional Housing Program. If we are unable to provide Transitional Housing to eligible participants, advocates will work with survivors to identify other available resources. These may include our Emergency Housing Funds, which can assist with one month of rent, utilities, or deposits, or our Safety & Stability Fund, a short-term rental assistance program providing up to three months of assistance or up to \$2,500.

How the Transitional Housing Program works:

Continued on Page 6

WE NOW OFFER TEXT BASED ADVOCACY

The Domestic Abuse Resource Center is excited to launch the addition of our text based advocacy services, through the IZZY platform.

- Advocates can be reached **8 am - 10 p.m.** via text, by texting **800-383-2988**.
- All messages go through an encrypted app and are **confidential and anonymous**.

TEXT 800-383-2988

9:45
Today
Hello. I am looking for domestic violence support in NE Iowa.
Great! Thank you for reaching out. We are here to help.





Decorah Cresco Bank & Trust

Prevention Starts with Us: Building a Future Free from Child Abuse

Why Prevention Matters

April is recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month—a time to raise awareness about protecting children and supporting families. Prevention starts with us. Each of us can help build a future where children are safe, supported, and able to thrive. While it may feel overwhelming, even small actions can make a meaningful difference. The key to prevention is being proactive and working together as a community.

Understanding Child Abuse and Its Impact

Child abuse and neglect are difficult topics but understanding them is an essential step toward prevention. When families have access to education, support, and resources, they are better equipped to provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. Prevention is more than responding to crises - it's about strengthening families before challenges become overwhelming. Through awareness, early intervention, and ongoing support, we can help create healthier homes and stronger communities. Helping Services is committed to this work by providing education, outreach, and supportive programs designed to empower families and caregivers. These efforts are an important part of building a network of care that surrounds children with safety and stability.

The Power of Prevention

Protective factors play a critical role in preventing child abuse and neglect. These include safe and stable environments, strong and supportive relationships, access to basic needs and resources, and the ability to cope with stress. When families recognize their own protective factors, they can better understand their strengths and identify areas where additional support may be helpful.

Focusing on these factors allows families to build resilience, prepare for challenges, and navigate difficult situations with confidence. Prevention is not about perfection, it's about connection, support, and growth.

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Open Play at Sunflower

Families in our community are invited once a month to gather at the *Sunflower Discovery Center* in Decorah for a free, open playgroup hosted by our Family Education program. During this time, children can explore a wide variety of play-based activities designed to support their growth, development, and creativity. In addition to play, families receive educational resources tailored to their needs. Topics are selected based on feedback from participating families, allowing each session to be personalized and relevant to what matters most to them.

Each month, approximately 10–15 families and 20–25 children attend this open play opportunity. Play is a vital part of a child's development, helping to strengthen social, language, cognitive, and problem-solving skills, while also supporting physical growth and emotional resilience. Our playgroup provides a welcoming space where children can feel safe, happy, and supported as they explore, learn, and have fun.



HELPING SERVICES
for Youth & Families

OPEN PLAY
SUNFLOWER DISCOVERY CENTER
2026 DATES & THEMES Time: 11:00am–12:30pm

FREE ENTRY!!

FEBRUARY 18 TH	HEALTHY SMILES PLAY DAY
MARCH 18 TH	FEELINGS & FRIENDSHIP
APRIL 15 TH	SAFE, STRONG & SUPPORTED
MAY 20 TH	GROWING & LEARNING
JUNE 17 TH	ACTIVE PLAY & HEALTHY BODIES
JULY 15 TH	FAMILY ROUTINES & SUMMER CARE
AUGUST 26 TH	READY TO GROW
SEPTEMBER 16 TH	STRONG MINDS & BIG FEELINGS
OCTOBER 21 ST	HEALTHY HABITS FOR GROWING KIDS
NOVEMBER 18 TH	SAFE PLAY & INJURY PREVENTION
DECEMBER 16 TH	CONNECTION, KINDNESS & COMMUNITY

Themes are here to add fun, not pressure! Nothing is mandatory - jump in, explore, or simply play like usual. Learning and play can happen side by side, at your family's pace.

MORE INFO:
(563)387-1720
HELPINGSERVICES.ORG

902 COMMERCE DR
DECORAH, IA



Message from the Director



This Spring marks the *10 year anniversary* of a name change that reflects who we are here to support—youth and families. While the organization's name changed slightly, our mission has remained the same. Our team aims to help support healthier and safer families & communities throughout northeast Iowa. Serving families *since 1973*, we are dedicated to responding to current needs of youth and families through empowerment, support and education.

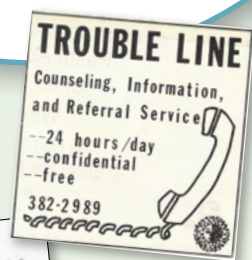
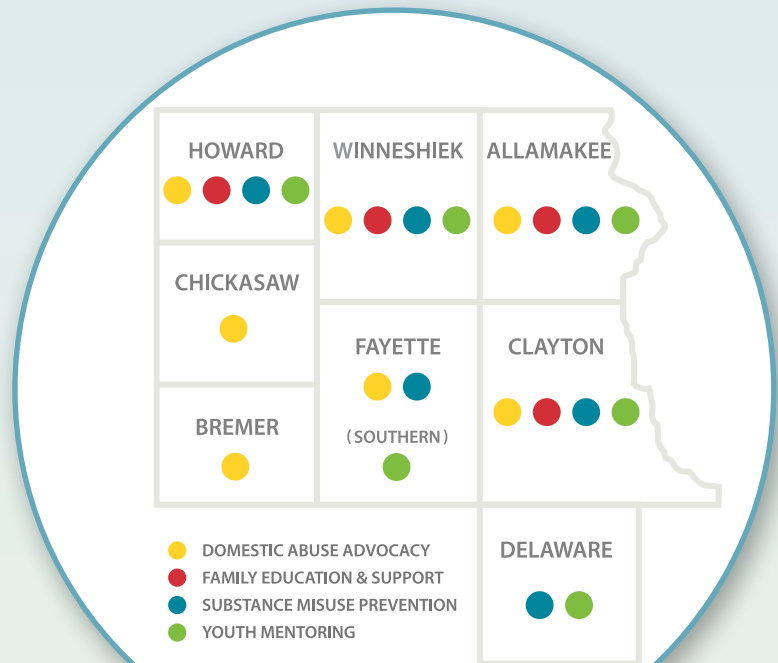
Thank you for walking alongside our team as we strive to make a difference in the lives of individuals, families and youth who we call our neighbors and friends in northeast Iowa.

Carson Eggel
Executive Director

Helping Services Board of Directors

- Renae Wedeking, *President*
- Kim Hennessy, *Secretary*
- Bill Holland, *Treasurer*
- Karine Guese
- Tiffany Johansen
- Dan Marx
- Stephanie Newsom
- Alexandra White

Board Members at Helping Services can serve up to three consecutive two year terms.



The name has changed over the years, but the mission has remained constant—supporting youth and families.

Learn more at helpingservices.org

Mentoring News

Youth Mentoring Success Stories

Keaton & Lucas

Keaton: I wanted to be a mentor because I've experienced firsthand what it's like to have an elder guide me towards the correct path and set me back on the right track. Also, I believe God bestowed great blessings and gifts upon all of us, so I want to serve others in any way I can. We have been matched since the beginning of last year, so this is my second year with Lucas. I first mentored him when he was just an elementary student and now, he's a growing middle schooler! During our time together each week, Lucas enjoys walking in the halls with me for 45 minutes to talk about anything and everything. Some days we have more serious talks about the importance of kindness and how two wrongs never make a right. Some days we have unserious talks about YouTube videos he sees and whether they're real, or we discuss his latest shopping list! Overall, Lucas and I are a perfect match. Even though we don't share the love of sports, we can share in the fact that fun can be had wherever you are and that happiness is a choice.

Keaton & Lucas



Ann & Maddie

Maddie: When the mentoring program began in Clayton County, Ann and Maddie became the first community-based match. One of the greatest successes of the program has been witnessing the positive impact their relationship has had on both of them. When they were first matched, Maddie was very shy and reserved. Her home and living situation did not often provide opportunities for her to participate in activities outside of school. Over time, it has been wonderful to see Maddie grow in confidence and develop a more positive and outgoing attitude. Ann works as a substitute teacher at Maddie's school, and Maddie enjoys running into her in the hallways during the school day. Maddie's family and teachers have also shared that they have noticed this positive growth in her confidence and engagement. In June 2025, the mentoring program hosted a group "Talent Show" event. While Ann and Maddie did not perform, they attended together and enjoyed supporting the other participants. The event was such a success that it has been requested again for June 2026. This time, Maddie plans for her and Ann to perform a ukulele duet, something they have recently started learning together. Their relationship is a great example of how mentoring can help youth build confidence, try new things, and create meaningful connections.



Brynn and Prasayis enjoy crafting together, including origami, as part of their mentoring time at the West Delaware Lambert After-School Program

BECOME A MENTOR!



Osro told the Mentoring Coordinator at his family interview that he wanted a mentor so he could learn how to fish. He has been with his mentor since 2024, and they go fishing all the time. They also often hang out at the mentor's farm. Mom has expressed that Osro has grown and come out of his shell since having

his mentor. Just in January of 2026, Osro and his mentor went to the Lake Meyer ice fishing Derby and Osro won the Northern Pike category with a 4lb fish. His mentor stated that he got skunked! Mom gives back to the program by always having a team in the annual Bowl-A-Thon because of the impact his mentor has made.



Youth Mentoring enjoyed a fun and educational day visiting the Driftless Area Education & Visitors Center in Lansing

How Do You Become a Mentor?

Mentoring Coordinators at Helping Services make it easy for you to become a mentor. They are available to help answer initial questions or concerns, provide initial and ongoing training, and walk alongside you during your mentoring journey.

Mentors are needed in Allamakee, Clayton, Delaware, Southern Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek counties.

- 1) Visit helpingservices.org/mentoring or call our office at **563-387-1720** and ask for a Mentoring Coordinator to learn more about the program.
- 2) Click the yellow **"Take the First Step"** box under Become A Mentor at helpingservices.org/mentoring and complete the google form.
- 3) A Mentoring Coordinator in your area will follow-up with you to provide an application and set up your interview/training.
- 4) Once your application is processed, you will meet with your Mentoring Coordinator, choose a youth, and undergo a simple 1-2 hour training to onboard you as a new Mentor.
- 5) **Enjoy your new experience as a trusted role model with a youth in your community!**



News from Around the State

A New Chapter for Iowa Victim Services and Survivors

As a member of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence's (ICADV) statewide network of 25 victim service provider organizations, we wanted to share some news. In late 2025, ICADV and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault's (IowaCASA) leadership and Board of Directors made a collaborative decision to transition statewide sexual assault coalition responsibilities to ICADV. This means ICADV is now Iowa's dual sexual and domestic violence coalition. This was a coalition-level transition only – the services you or someone you know receives through the Domestic Abuse Resource Center at Helping Services have not changed.

This is a significant moment for the landscape of Iowa victim services and survivors. Sexual violence coalition services have a strong, protected home going forward, and, to be clear, they are not being folded in as an afterthought. Dedicated staff, specialized expertise, and protected resources are being cultivated specifically for this work. At the same time, domestic violence services stand as an equal pillar of the coalition's work. Both are linked, but distinct priorities, and both will be strengthened.

Currently, ICADV is in the early stages of a strategic plan—which includes a full agency rebrand—to reflect this new chapter and what it means for victim service providers, their teams, and the survivors, families, and communities they serve. This transformation is about building a foundation that ensures Iowa victim service provider organizations doing this critical work have the support and training they need.

We are proud to be part of this moment and to work alongside ICADV in this next chapter for victim services in Iowa—and thankful to have your support alongside us.

To learn more about ICADV, visit www.icadv.org

Article submitted by Lindsay Pingel
Director of Community Engagement at ICADV

- 4) If approved, rental assistance is paid directly to the landlord or housing provider for up to 12 months.
- 5) If housing assistance is not available through the Transitional Housing Program, advocates will work with the survivor to identify other resources and supports.
- 6) The Transitional Housing Coordinator provides ongoing case management, budgeting support, and housing-focused advocacy throughout the program, as well as follow-up support after the program ends.

This program is made possible through funding provided by the Office on Violence Against Women, and we are incredibly grateful to bring this important resource to survivors in our community.

If you or someone you know could benefit from this program, please contact our advocates at 800-383-2988 or start a confidential chat at www.helpingservices.org/chat

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How Communities Can Make a Difference

Prevention is most effective when it involves the entire community. Schools, childcare providers, healthcare professionals, neighbors, and local organizations all play a role in supporting families.

Community programs and partnerships provide essential resources and create opportunities for families to connect and learn. Just as importantly, we must foster a culture where families feel supported, not judged. When people feel safe asking for help, they are more likely to reach out early.

What Individuals Can Do

Everyone has a role in preventing child abuse. Simple actions can make a difference: check in on others, offer support, learn the signs of abuse, encourage positive parenting, and report concerns when needed. Even small gestures—like listening without judgment—can help families feel supported.

Throughout April, communities across the country recognize Child Abuse Prevention Month through awareness activities and events. Blue ribbons and pinwheels serve as powerful symbols of hope, reminding us of the importance of nurturing safe and happy childhoods.

One important way to show your support is by participating in Wear Blue Friday on April 10th. By wearing blue, you help raise awareness and show solidarity in the effort to prevent child abuse.

In addition, we host events throughout the community during the month of April. These opportunities provide meaningful ways to get involved—whether by attending, volunteering, or helping spread awareness.

Preventing child abuse is a shared responsibility. By staying informed, supporting families, and acting, we can create a safer future for children.

If you'd like to learn more or get connected with our Family Education & Support Team, you can reach us at our office at 563-387-1720!

Continued from Page 1

How the Transitional Housing Program works:

- 1) Survivors connect with an advocate at the Domestic Abuse Resource Center to determine eligibility.
- 2) The advocate and survivor complete the Transitional Housing application together.
- 3) The Transitional Housing Coordinator reviews applications and confirms eligibility and availability in the program.

Northeast Iowa RSVP ▶



ERASE Evening of Training



Thank you to those who joined the Winneshiek County ERASE Coalition for an evening of training with topics that covered suicide prevention, opioid overdose education, the state of Iowa behavioral health realignment, and Your Life Iowa.

Youth Groups Stay Busy in Delaware County

Maquoketa Valley High School, T.E.L (Teens Eliminating Lies) youth group, stays active and involved throughout the school year. Each Spring the group participates in Red Ribbon Week activities, with many recruitment efforts, peer education, and their favorite annual tradition, a student-led "tailgate". This gathering brings students together for an afternoon filled with healthy coping strategies, interactive activities, sunshine, laughter and connection with friends. Following the stress of tests each May, students look forward to this opportunity to relax, recharge, and celebrate another successful year. Members take great pride in planning and hosting this event for their peers as a meaningful way to wrap up the school year. MVTEL also has 2 members who were selected to participate in the state's executive youth council for ISTEP (Iowa Students for Tobacco Education & Prevention).

Edgewood Colesburg YODA youth group experienced an advisor transition this year, creating an opportunity to refocus and brainstorm new recruitment ideas and initiatives. Although it has been a quieter year for activities, students contributed educational articles to school newsletters and continued planning their annual visit to the elementary school to lead engaging lessons and activities for younger students. This year's focus highlights the important connection between physical activity and mental health. The group is energized with fresh ideas and looks forward to implementing their new ideas in the upcoming school year.

Scooter's Coffee • Decorah



Decorah Public Library ▶



◀ Decorah Police Department



Kerndt Brothers Savings Bank





HELPING SERVICES for Youth & Families

PO Box 372 • Decorah, IA 52101

Update your contact info at info@helpingservices.org



*Look inside to learn
how to become
a mentor!*

Thank You Bowlers for a **GREAT** Bowl-A-Thon!

On Saturday, March 21, 75 bowlers struck up the lanes at King Pin Entertainment Center in Decorah for the 2026 Youth Mentoring Bowl-A-Thon. We are grateful for the \$8,195 raised to support Youth Mentoring!

We are incredibly thankful to all of our sponsors, donors, and bowlers. The striking success of the Bowl-A-Thon would not be possible without you.

We'd like to thank our generous sponsors...

\$500 sponsors: The Allamakee County Attorney and the Allamakee Sheriff's Department, Casey's, Mabe's, and Paul Hudson • State Farm

\$300-499 sponsors: Decorah Bank and Cresco Bank and Trust, Lucia Hutchcroft, Perry & Wendy Novak, Oneota Valley Family Eye Care, Wicks Construction, WinnMed, and Ziegler CAT

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Learn more at helpingservices.org 

